

DP: Hey, it's 106° in the Twin Cities and also in Waco, Texas and that's important because on the line is our guest for this first part of the second hour, Roger E. Olson. Roger's gonna' join us here with a conversation that we try to have in the second hour on the program where we try to have a long conversation with a theologian, with scientists, with thinkers, with musicians, with people who are trying to create a way of life in the world and a way of Christian thought in the world that we live in. Roger is a professor of theology at Truett Seminary which is part of Baylor University.

JM: Yeah, I think Roger needs to read some books (laughter).

DP: Roger is quite, uh, quite...

JM: Erudite.

DP: Erudite. And, He's written a series of blog posts and this is why I invited him to be on the show, and they're part of a forthcoming book called "Against Calvinism". Trying to, in his words, trying to rescue, evangelicalism from a particular worldview. So, Roger thanks for being on the program. As you know, I'm Doug, we know each other, but John Musek, the sidekick was the other one talking there. So thanks for being on the program.

RO: Its good to be with you and I thought when you said 106° you were telling the temperature in Waco.

(Laughter)

DP: Is it 106°? Because it's a beautiful 79° in Minneapolis today.

RO: It's going to be 106° today. I was up in Dallas the other day and it was 114°.

DP: My goodness.

RO: So, that's our summer in Texas.

DP: Yeah, and, how many days in a row have you topped 100 degrees? Is it, are they still counting?

RO: Thirty some.

Frank Turk 8/20/11 6:23 AM

**Comment [1]:** Let's remember that Olson doesn't do anything to repudiate this summary of his objective, and plainly: he heard it.

DP: Unbelievable. Unbelievable. (Laughter) And, isn't it something to think that people...

RO: It's normally hot here in the summer, but not this bad.

DP: And, to think that people like, lived there in like the 1910's and 1930's before there was air-conditioning.

JM: Right.

DP: Maybe there weren't as many people living there.

RO: No basements to go to either.

DP: Well, uh, Roger I'm so glad you're on the show and to give a little bit of background to people who would be listening and maybe don't know and don't, you know, sort of geek out like you and I might do on the ins and outs of religion in America. Evangelicalism is this big category that for the last sixty, seventy years has captured a large portion of American Protestantism. And, so there's people from the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America, the ELCA which is big here in the Twin Cities, so they start with Evangelical in their name, to the National Association of Evangelicals, to Jimmy Carter being declared, uh, you know, as the president in 1976 the year of the evangelical. There's this whole category of Evangelicalism, which to an outsider might all look the same, might sort of look like an amorphous group of the same thing. And, you hear from certain representatives, who are quite proud to say, "We are evangelicals and we will tell you what it means to be evangelicals. But, there is a bit of a, of a, wrestling match, there's a bit of a duel, there's a little bit of an argument going on within that group. A very large group of, of Christians in America about, well, what are the requirements and what are the restrictions around what it means to be an evangelical. And, you have picked on the, up on the fact that there's one tribe within that larger group that tend to come from a Calvinist, Reformed background that are trying to really put stakes in the ground to say, "We will define what it means to be evangelical", and you think that's a problem, um, and so you're trying to raise conversations about how that's not the only way to think about it. Do I have that somewhat right in my...

RO: Well. You said it all. I don't know what else there is to say.

Frank Turk 8/20/11 6:25 AM

**Comment [2]:** Let's also remember that when Pagitt says this, he means that anyone who wants to call himself "evangelical" ought to be able to without any questions about how that category applies. He has told me as much.

Frank Turk 8/20/11 6:29 AM

**Comment [3]:** Again: what's interesting in Dr. Olson's overall lack of improving what Pagitt says here. In about 7 words he could have fixed what's wrong with this view and this approach, but he doesn't. It is also interesting that here Pagitt frames it sort of innocuously -Lutherans, EV-Free, Jimmy Carter on the soft end. But when you drill down, he means the Open theists, the unitarians, and so on. I wonder if he thinks Nixon was an evangelical?

Frank Turk 8/20/11 6:29 AM

**Comment [4]:** There is the topic. Let's see what Olson says about it.

Frank Turk 8/20/11 6:39 AM

**Comment [5]:** The reader should consider it. Pagitt says [1] Evangelicalism is a super-big tent, [2] it doesn't really have any boundaries, and [3] Calvinists are, problematically, trying to change that; Dr. Olson says: "You said it. I don't know what else there is to say." If nothing else happened in this conversation, I'd say, "case closed."

DP: (Laughter) No. I think there's a lot to say, because...

RO: We'll think of something.

JM: Uh, Boy, Roger! Doug has a tendency to do that, I believe.

DP: No, I just tried to set it up for our...

JM: Set it up!? You baked the cake and iced it. (Laughter)

DP: No, I didn't.

JM: Roger's just going to be listening from now on.

DP: No, No. (Laughter) Okay, so if that's the circumstance, right, that's the dilemma. I, when I want to be you know fiery about it, I say there's this little cabal of folks that are getting together to tell all the rest of us what it means to be evangelical. And, if we're not like them then we're not one. And you've chosen to take this on in both a professional academic and, kind of you know, pastoral way to say, no there needs to be something else in that. Tell us why you think that's important and what you're up to.

RO: Well, Evangelicalism as I mean it, when I use the word, uh usually refers to the stream of protestant Christianity, though I don't exclude Catholics necessarily, but it goes back to the great awakening of the 1740's and the two great-granddaddy's of evangelicalism as a religious type in America are, uh, Jonathan Edwards and John Wesley. They were both born in 1703. Now in 2003 there was a lot of talk about Jonathan Edwards and not as much about John Wesley, unfortunately. (Laughter) And, I want to hold them both together. Now Jonathan Edwards, of course, most people know as the puritan preacher of "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God", and he was that, but he was also a philosopher and a theologian and a biblical scholar and even a scientist.

DP: Hey, did Wesley...

RO: He was a brilliant man.

DP: Did Wesley and Edwards die on the same day like Jefferson and Adams?

(Laughter)

Frank Turk 8/20/11 6:40 AM

**Comment [6]:** Thanks for the clarification

Frank Turk 8/20/11 6:41 AM

**Comment [7]:** Watch how careful Olson is here to tell us what he means. There's no mistaking it when he's done – and it is Pagitt's view.

Frank Turk 8/20/11 6:42 AM

**Comment [8]:** I think it would be interesting to see how Dr. Olson's view differs from, for example, John Piper's use of the word. Than see if the criticism from Olson has any gas left in the tank.

Frank Turk 8/20/11 6:46 AM

**Comment [9]:** Um? Would Wesley and Edwards be this broad-minded? So what is Olson actually saying here?

Frank Turk 8/20/11 6:49 AM

**Comment [10]:** I wonder if either of these guys would affirm this statement: "Wesley believed that the living core of the Christian faith was revealed in Scripture, illumined by tradition, vivified in personal experience, and confirmed by reason. Scripture [however] is primary, revealing the Word of God 'so far as it is necessary for our salvation'" (source: united Methodist church book of discipline)

Frank Turk 8/20/11 6:50 AM

**Comment [11]:** So here's the start for the rest of the interview: Pagitt has said all that needs to be said about the problem, and Olson re-writes history in order to start reconstructing his argument.

RO: No, they were just born in the same year.

DP: Born in the same year.

RO: Edwards died quite a bit younger than Wesley did, and as far as we know they never met, but they did know of each other. Edwards was the Calvinist. He was what we call a five point Calvinist or a high Calvinist. He believe in limited atonement, that Christ died only for the elect. That God selected certain people to be saved, uh, before He, uh, even created the world and so forth. John Wesley was an Arminian. That is someone who believes that God doesn't preselect who's going to be saved, but offers people His grace and leaves it up to them to accept it or reject it. Now those two streams, in all their varieties, but those two...

DP: Mhmm.

RO: ...general streams have been in the evangelical community ever since Edwards and Wesley. But, there's always been a tug of war, too.

DP: Mhmm.

RO: ...And, it kind of has it's ups and downs. Sometimes it quietens down. That is the conversation, the argument about it, and then it comes back. And, in the last 20 to 25 years it's come back with a vengeance...

DP: Mhmm. Mhmm.

RO: ...among evangelicals. Especially among evangelical scholars and movers and shakers. I don't know, you know, how much this filters down to the, to the pews although I think it does, in certain ways, they may not really understand what's going on but the evangelical community is sort of been shaking out, lets say, in terms of either you're evangelical, I'm sorry, either you're Calvinist or you're Arminian and Calvinists especially like to say they're really the, the sort of norm for all of Evangelicalism. I don't hear Arminians saying that as much. And, so what I'm trying to do is simply bring attention to the fact, that uh, poor Wesley who didn't get talked about very much in seventeen o', uh, in twenty o' three, except among Methodists because he was the founder of the Methodist tradition. But, I want to bring the memory of him and of Arminianism back as a legitimate, equal

Frank Turk 8/20/11 6:54 AM

**Comment [12]:** This is how Olson [here](#) describes Arminianism – and it may actually be true of Wesley. However, think on this: which Calvinist that these two guys might mention *actually believes* that anyone who doesn't believe in unconditional election is either not an evangelical or not a Christian? Can one be named? I look forward to seeing one named.

Frank Turk 8/20/11 6:55 AM

**Comment [13]:** That is: the main figures in Evangelicalism turn out to be Calvinists, not Arminians.

Frank Turk 8/20/11 6:56 AM

**Comment [14]:** Which is an interesting assertion, but it is factless.

Frank Turk 8/20/11 6:56 AM

**Comment [15]:** Except, of course, in this discussion on this radio show.

partner in, in what it means to be evangelical.

DP: Mhmm.

RO: That's really what I was trying to do.

DP: Now why do you think that's come back with such a vengeance. Do you have a sense, and not stealing from your book that's forthcoming, it's coming out in the next uh, in the next few, few months, is that right?

RO: October.

DP: And, it's called, "Against Calvinism:...

RO: I've \_\_\_\_\_ through that several times.

DP: ..."Rescuing God's Reputation from Radical Reformed Theology"?

RO: (Laughter) Right.

DP: Yeah, um, so...

RO: "Rescuing God's Reputation from Radical Reformed Theology" was my subtitle. The publisher dropped the subtitle and it's just called "Against Calvinism", but I think they're going to put that on the back cover or something like that.

DP: Mhmm. Mhmm. And, why do you think there's been this return to this particular view, uh, and Calvinism, to give a little context to it, that was a theological innovation by a guy named John Calvin. These people are all named Johns, which sorta' makes me think it should've been called Johnnyism or something instead of evangelicalism (Laughter). But John Calvin was a, was a theological entrepreneur and thinker and scholar in his own day, and then guys like Edwards pick up in that tradition. Why do you think that particular tradition has enraptured so many people in the last 20 or 25 years to be so aggressive about putting forth that particular theological viewpoint and telling other, "Eh, if you're not in on that, you're really not in on the deal." What do you think it is about our culture...

RO: Well, there are a few personalities, uh, who are very

Frank Turk 8/20/11 6:57 AM

**Comment [16]:** When he can demonstrate that legitimate arminianism has ever been banished from evangelical circles, we can start the reparations.

Frank Turk 8/20/11 6:58 AM

**Comment [17]:** Here's the money section of the interview. It starts right here.

Frank Turk 8/20/11 6:59 AM

**Comment [18]:** Not that Augustine believed this stuff or anything. Calvin was an innovator – and entrepreneur.

Frank Turk 8/20/11 7:01 AM

**Comment [19]:** Observe that pagitt paints the matter as broadly as possible here – "if you're not in on that, you're not really in on the deal." If he can produce any Calvinist who says people who do not believe in unconditional election are not Christians, he can make this statement – but movements like T4G and TGC are centered on the Gospel, not election/Calvinism, right? So who is he talking about?

Calvinistic. Um, one of them is right there in Minneapolis...

DP: Mhmm.

RO: ...but there are others who are scattered around the country who have written books...

DP: Mhmm.

RO: ...that have been very popular. And, I think that one of the, one of the things that we would agree on, that is they and I would agree on, is that evangelicalism over the last, say, 25, 30 years has kind of lost its theological...

DP: Mmm.

RO: ...uh, depth you might say. It's become somewhat shallow theologically. And, so they've stepped in, and, and I don't fault them for this, and said, "Here's a theology for those of you who want one, and you really need one whether you know it or not, and it answers all your major questions..."

DP: Mmm.

RO: "...It wraps the Gospel up in a nice system and here it is. It's very rational, it's very Biblical and once you get inside the system everything becomes clear." And, that's the appeal of Calvinism to many people, and there've been some really loud, notable personalities among evangelicals who've really raised their voices to say that in the last 25 years with tremendous success, especially among young men in their late teens and in twenties.

DP: Well, I was gonna' ask you about that because it does seem that this seems that this is a movement that strikes at a particular people group. Young men, um, in their twenties and, or maybe early thirties. Like you're saying, what, do you think there's something about that stage of life, or that like cultural group that makes that particular theological view attractive? Because a bunch of us have been writing books, right? It's not just that these...

RO: Yeah.

DP: It's not that these are the only folks writing books or running

Frank Turk 8/20/11 7:02 AM

**Comment [20]:** So here Olson says explicitly, "John Piper is one of those who would toss people out of Evangelicalism if they don't believe in election/Calvinism." Is that true? If not, why say it like it is?

Frank Turk 8/20/11 7:03 AM

**Comment [21]:** Now, get this: anyone who has written a book with a Piper-esque theology is here labeled as having an urgency to toss non-TULIP theology out of evangelicalism. Is that true?

Frank Turk 8/20/11 7:03 AM

**Comment [22]:** To be fair: points to Olson for agreeing with this issue.

Frank Turk 8/20/11 7:47 AM

**Comment [23]:** There's some really fantastic irony here – because in this period, Doug Pagitt has been one of these "raised voices", and his message has been pretty resoundingly rejected by young people. Keep that in mind as we advance into the accusation here. The premise is that the Calvinist message

Frank Turk 8/20/11 8:12 AM

**Comment [24]:** Sets the accusation up.

Frank Turk 8/20/11 8:12 AM

**Comment [25]:** "Stage of life"? More of the set-up.

Frank Turk 8/20/11 8:13 AM

**Comment [26]:** Get the awesome self-approval: My books and Pipers books are of the same influence and of the same quality. Wow!

radio shows.

RO: Right.

DP: But, why the uh, why is there such an attraction? Do you have a, do you have an "I suppose" on why young men at that age find this particular view so attractive?

RO: Well, I've, I've been tempted to call it testosterone theology (laughter)...

DP: Mhmm.

RO: ...because it is so popular among young men. I think the reason is because it gives an idea of God as very powerful, as very controlling, as um, I almost want to say manipulative and from my view it is, but I don't think that's necessarily what the young men who adopt it would say, but it does give them permission, in my opinion, it gives them permission to be that way.

DP: Mmm.

RO: Because if God is that way and we're created in God's image then why couldn't we be that way, too? And, lets face it, most young men in America have a natural kind of tendency to want to be powerful, if not controlling those around them, and it

DP: Watch it Roger, I'll crush you (laughter). Yeah. Hang on through the break. I think this is really interesting and I think it's helpful for people and I'd love for you to talk a little bit about what you are suggesting as an alternative way for evangelicalism to move forward in the world with a more open sensibility to it when we come here, after the break.

RO: Okay.

DP: Folks if you want to follow up on any of this you can go to the Doug Pagitt Radio page on Facebook and you can find a link to Roger Olson. Um, he, he blogs over at Patheos which is a website we've talked about here on the program a number of times, so you can follow his blot posts there. You can also pick up his books and all the rest of that. We'll gonna' be back here after the break with Roger Olson talking about maybe the future of evangelicalism from his perspective

Frank Turk 8/20/11 8:16 AM

**Comment [27]:** The most important thing to grasp here: "this particular view" is the view which is governing young men, and is trying to tell other people "you're not part of the deal".

Frank Turk 8/20/11 8:18 AM

**Comment [28]:** Permission to do what? Clearly: to control others.

This is a slander – it's false, and it's constructed on everything before it. And worse: it is also a reproach against Wesley who, frankly, would say that some views are not Christian, evangelical views.

Frank Turk 8/20/11 8:18 AM

**Comment [29]:** Check that: Calvinism makes people want to be the judge the way God is the judge. Incredible.

and what hope there might be for those of us who can't plug into that story as it's been laid out by so many loud voices in the last 25 years. So stick with us here on AM950 and DougPagittRadio.com.